# 2017–18 Level 5 School Annual Evaluation Report Morgan Full Service Community School, Holyoke, Massachusetts

### Receiver: Superintendent/District Receiver Stephen Zrike

## Introduction

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) contracted with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to collect evidence from each Level 5 school on the progress toward implementation of the turnaround plan in Year 4 of Level 5 status. DESE facilitated the collection of information from the receiver throughout the year for the quarterly reports, detailing highlights and challenges during the previous quarter and progress toward benchmarks. In addition, in November 2017, AIR staff collected data through instructional observations using Teachstone’s Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS),[[1]](#footnote-1) and in February 2018 conducted a monitoring site visit that included key stakeholder interviews and focus groups, an instructional staff survey, and a review of extant documentation (e.g., turnaround plan, quarterly reports, and other documents). In spring 2018, subsequent data were collected by conducting follow-up instructional observations and interviews with the school principal. The data collection and analysis processes were developed purposely to ensure that the data were reliable and valid, and that the findings were informed by the appropriate key informants. For Level 5 schools, data were collected during the monitoring site visit and follow-up activities to inform DESE’s statutory requirement to annually evaluate each Level 5 school’s progress toward implementing the turnaround plan. AIR’s Level 5 school review process focused on work at each school related to each of the specific turnaround practice areas.

## Highlights of Turnaround Plan Implementation at Morgan Full Service Community School

Overall throughout the 2017–18 school year, Morgan Full Service Community School (Morgan) leaders continued to emphasize developing the skills of their teachers to plan high-quality, rigorous core instruction. Staff focused on differentiation through the use of SNAP (student needs assessment profile) charts to ensure that every student had an entry point to the lesson and could work to his or her full potential. Staff also concentrated on having students write across content areas and increase accountable talk and cognitive sweat.

The school continued to emphasize the importance of using data to inform schoolwide decisions and classroom instruction. Teachers and leaders analyzed the results from formative and summative assessments throughout the school year. Staff continued to use data from the Achievement Network (ANet) and STAR assessments to assign students to appropriate interventions and inform next instructional steps to accelerate growth toward grade-level standards. In addition, the receiver and school principal conducted biweekly walkthroughs to assess the rigor of instruction using the Depth of Knowledge (DOK) framework.

Morgan also made progress with improving and refining its behavior management system. Specifically, the Jaguar Team (the team focused on schoolwide behavior) began to use Room 7 (an empty classroom) to help students de-escalate and return to their classrooms promptly. Family and community engagement continued to be a focus at Morgan, with every teacher expected to conduct a minimum of three home visits per quarter. Morgan teachers planned grade-level events so that families had opportunities to participate in their child’s academic success. There were also schoolwide events to develop the Morgan community.

Morgan continued to struggle to fill teaching positions, particularly at the middle school grades. School leaders creatively used available staff (e.g., instructional leadership specialists) and substitutes to provide students with high-quality instruction. Next year, as part of a districtwide school reorganization, the school will transition to serving students only in prekindergarten through fourth grade. School leaders report great success in hiring and retaining quality teachers to serve these grade levels.

## End-of-Year Findings

### Turnaround Practice 1: Leadership, Shared Responsibility, and Professional Collaboration

Morgan school leaders placed an increased emphasis on building the capacity of the instructional leadership team (ILT) to sustain improvement efforts. Together, the ILT members established the focus for the cohort meetings to ensure cohesion across the school. (Cohort meetings are teachers grouped by grades pre-K–2, grades 3–8 mathematics, and grades 3–8 English language arts.) Beginning in January, school leaders released the facilitation of these weekly cohort planning meetings to the ILT members. School leaders examined the weekly agendas and attended the meetings, when they were available, to monitor progress and provide feedback to the facilitators.

Morgan staff spent the year centered on their instructional focus (“All Morgan students will analyze complex texts & problems and cite text evidence to explain their thinking and reasoning both orally and in writing. To ensure student success, instructors will implement common protocols, such as two-column notes and top-down topic webs, in all content areas. Success will be measured by student performance on district- and school-based formative and summative assessments throughout the academic year.”). Specifically, Morgan staff concentrated on increasing the academic rigor of instruction, the amount of accountable talk within the classroom, and opportunities to write across content areas. Professional learning was developed for these priority areas, and school leaders actively monitored progress through means including biweekly classroom observations conducted by the receiver focused on assessing the rigor of instruction, using the Depth of Knowledge framework.

School leaders placed an increased emphasis on developing trusting relationships among staff to encourage professional growth. Similar to last year, teachers continued not only to engage in peer observations to receive live feedback, but also to learn from one another. In addition, teachers videotaped themselves delivering a lesson. Grade-level teams then watched, debriefed, and provided feedback to the presenting teacher during their weekly planning meeting. Teachers also watched videos of Morgan teachers from other grade levels to see the implementation of school foci in other grades and content areas.

Looking toward next year, staff turnover is expected to be lower than in the past. As mentioned in the highlights section, Morgan will transition to serving students in prekindergarten through fourth grade in 2018–19, and anticipates retaining nearly all instructors in those grades. Openings for next year included two special education teachers and a third-grade mathematics and science teacher, and these positions were filled by June 2018. The school will retain the two instructional learning specialists (ILSs): one to support mathematics and the other to support ELA instruction.

### Turnaround Practice 2: Intentional Practices for Improving Instruction

Morgan staff have concentrated on increasing the rigor of instruction using Webb’s Depth of Knowledge throughout the school year, for example by increasing student discourse through a focus on accountable talk. At the upper elementary and middle grade levels, teachers also have focused on differentiating instruction. Teachers were expected to plan lessons intentionally to ensure every student could access the lesson. A significant development in this work was the creation of SNAP charts, which detail grade-level expectations, strategies to push students who are above grade level, and ways to support struggling students. This work will continue next year, and school leaders already are planning how to present this to staff during the summer professional development.

Teachers at Morgan understand the importance of using data to inform classroom instruction. Staff continued to use STAR and ANet assessments three times each throughout the school year, as well as other formative data. As a result of monitoring efforts, school leaders identified mathematics instruction in grades 3–8 as an area of need. As a result, all teachers in this grade span administered weekly assessments that pulled released questions from the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), PARCC, and ANet exams. Every teacher had a weekly, individual meeting with the principal and assistant principal where they discussed the results of these assessments and formed small groups of students for more targeted instruction. This practice continued throughout the school year.

Due to staffing challenges in the middle school, particularly with hiring qualified teachers for grades 5 and 6 mathematics and grades 7 and 8 ELA, the ILSs’ role shifted to work more directly with students to support high-quality instruction.

### Turnaround Practice 3: Student-Specific Supports and Instruction to All Students

Morgan continued to implement a targeted intervention block to serve the needs of all students. Staff reassigned students to interventions every six to eight weeks, based on STAR or ANet assessment data or other data sources (e.g., Lexia, ST Math, classroom assessments). Teachers continued to take ownership in this task and came prepared to these meetings with preanalyzed data. Students could participate in both ELA and mathematics interventions over the course of the school year, depending on their needs.

As a result of their monitoring process, school leaders identified mathematics instruction in grades 3–8 as a priority area. To this end, afterschool math tutoring was offered to a targeted group of students in grades 4 and 6–8. Participating students were identified primarily through their performance on the STAR midyear assessment and teachers contacted the parents of these students directly to encourage participation. This program was funded using a district grant from January through April, and school leaders would like to offer this program again next year if the grant continues to be available.

This year, the school had a reading interventionist who pulled small groups to provide targeted interventions. Due to the change in grades being served next year, and therefore a decrease in the number of students enrolled at Morgan, the school’s funding will decrease significantly. As a result, the reading interventionist position will not be available next year. To address this gap and to support struggling students, school leaders have modified the ILS job description; next year, the ILSs will spend more of their time providing students with interventions.

### Turnaround Practice 4: School Climate and Culture

Morgan staff continued to focus on behavior management, and progress has been made in defining the role of the Jaguar Team and expectations for Room 7. The Jaguar Team provided school staff with training in when to make a referral and what supports they may implement before the situation escalates to a referral. Teachers reported feeling supported by the Jaguar Team and praised its quick response times when a referral was necessary. In addition, the team worked to improve the way room 7 was used to de-escalate behavior. This year, greater emphasis was placed on enabling students to return quickly to their classrooms from Room 7. In addition, the time spent in Room 7 was structured based on individual students’ needs and could include meditation or a reflective mini-lesson. Communication also improved between the Jaguar Team and classroom teachers so that everyone was aware of what supports the student received when out of the classroom and what follow-up would occur (e.g., who would call the student’s parents).

Morgan staff continued to improve outreach to families and build momentum in this area. Specifically, all teachers were expected to conduct home visits; 97% of teachers had conducted at least three home visits by the middle of the school year, with many conducting more than three. Families that had not yet participated in one of the school events were targeted for home visits to begin forming a relationship. The number of families participating in school-sponsored events also increased throughout the school year. Morgan teachers planned grade-level events so families could observe their student in action, see authentic student work, and understand the grade-level demand. Examples included grade-level spelling bees, a second-grade family cultural writing event, a fifth- and sixth-grade parent data night, and the eighth-grade career fair. There were also schoolwide events, such as monthly Friday Fun Nights and the STEM fair at the end of May. However, finding parents to participate on the school council continued to be a struggle, and school leaders reported low parent engagement in this team. In planning for next year, school leaders would like to host more events where parents can witness their child’s academic performance, as these types of events are among the most popular at the school, with high turnout.

1. See Teachstone’s website for more information: <http://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/336169/What-is-CLASS_Info_Sheet.pdf?t=1432824252621>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)